

Holiday special! Show your character honoring the holidays through both realizing what they have to be grateful for in their lives, and through *sacrificial* giving.

Preferably include some sort of character progression in the story.

This is due **January 3rd, 2017**

Cold

November 5th, Rejection's Herb Fields

The grounds had long turned barren from the change of weather, yet today many tread upon it as they explored the festivities. Various colorful booths sat in neat rows, some offering food, others games or knowledge. An area was left open for children to run and play on one end, and on the other a wooden stage sat, where people would carelessly dance, sing, or tell a story.

It was Rejection's twice-yearly Culture Festival, a time that invited many of different race and religion to come together and mingle and learn about each other. It lasted a week, and held occasional special events. It even attracted Feydragons, the small creatures snacking on food left on the ground and helping to keep the place clean.

Dracustos casually strolled between the rows, making his way to Iroh's booth. The oriental man offered teas, sake, and an assortment of Chinese snacks. The halfbreed was having a hankering for fish, and so looked forward to getting some sushi.

There was currently a small group of teens at the stand, one of them frantically fanning his mouth as the others laughed. Iroh was grinning and set a glass out, and the boy took it and chugged its contents, panting afterward. Something was said to him, but he shook his head and, after exchanging farewells, left the booth. Dracustos approached and chuckled.

"What did you do to that poor kid, old man?" He received a sly grin, then a gesture to a sign to his left.

"He decided to try my Dragonfire Challenge." The halfbreed smiled with an amused snort. The burning of Iroh's super-hot chicken dish could only be sated by a special tea he made, and he sometimes used it to prank the younger generation when they think they can take anything. Few can handle the dish, and the fire-breather had yet to try it.

"You know what, Iroh? Let me have a go." The man laughed.

"You sure? I know you breathe fire, but this is a different kind of heat."

"I've taken everything else you've thrown at me. Hit me with it." Iroh's sly grin grew before he stepped to the back where his small portable kitchen resided. Dracustos sat on one of the stools and waited; he enjoyed watching the man cook. The small piece of chicken didn't take long to prepare, and Iroh set it at the stand's opening.

"Last chance to back out," he warned, but the halfbreed shook his head.

"Why waste such good food?" he asked sarcastically, taking the dish. As he popped the bite-sized piece of meat into his mouth Iroh reached into the mini fridge to his right and poured a glass of the heat-curing tea, setting it out with a slick smile.

Draco's eyes widened as the heat suddenly hit him, spreading across his mouth and to his throat, and he had to keep himself from choking as he swallowed. He huffed a couple times, tears actually welling up in his eyes, a numbing burn becoming the only sensation in his mouth.

"Sweet mother of La Vibra, what the hell is in that sauce?!" he choked. Iroh laughed.

"I tried to warn you, son!" He pushed the glass over, gesturing for the halfbreed to drink. But it was refused.

"Nope- finishing this challenge," Dracustos said with a shake of the head. He coughed as the burn slowly continued to spread down his throat and tried huffing out a couple small puffs of fire, but that only made it worse. It was the longest minute of his life.

"Haha! You can drink now my boy!" Iroh grabbed the tea and offered it, and the glass was taken with haste. Dracustos panted after finishing the drink, a slight burn still lingering. "So, how was it?"

"I think that stuff shouldn't be legal." This earned another bout of laughter, and Dracustos grinned with a humored huff.

"Well, now that I've proven even the mighty Dracustos has trouble with spicy food, what is it you really came here for? It's on the house since you dominated my challenge." The halfbreed stuck his tongue out and rolled his eyes with a shake of the head.

"I'm here for some sushi."

"Ah, anything specific?"

"Surprise me - and not with that devil's blood you call sauce." Iroh nodded, returning to his kitchen to prepare the snack. The Draconian's ear swiveled to the side; he could sense someone familiar approaching.

"This place is certainly something," Dr. Macbeth commented, brushing a few stray hairs back into place. "I've seen nearly every race and culture here with little to no conflict; it's quite the sight." Dracustos turned his gaze to the man.

"That's somewhat the point of this festival; to teach people we can get along no matter our origins or traditions."

"Whomever came up with the idea must be in high regards." David noticed the fire-breather's countenance change, eyes softening and a sad smile finding its way to his lips.

"It was my mother's idea," he replied. The doctor opened his mouth to say something more, but was interrupted by Iroh.

"Here you go, my friend-" He stopped, noticing the scaly being's expression. "Alright, who mentioned Leia?"

"I'm afraid I got him on the subject," David answered apologetically.

"It's fine... I'm fine." Dracustos took the sushi and popped a piece into his mouth.

"Obviously you are not. Every time your mother is mentioned you get that look." With a sigh the blue beast turned his gaze to the ground.

"Sorry, I just... some wounds... don't really heal." He scooped up the paper plate and silently walked away. David began to follow, but was stopped by the old man.

"He'll be fine, just give him a minute." The doctor glanced between them, then took a seat.

"I take it he and his mother were close?"

"Very. When she passed, he secluded himself from us, sometimes leaving the house for days on end doing who knows what. Not sure how long this went on, or what snapped him out of it. To be honest, after a while we stopped coming over to check on him. We figured he needed some time alone; though, we would have never guessed he'd stay away for so long. We would have started going back had it not been for The Tribe."

Dr. Macbeth rubbed his chin in thought, then looked in the direction Dracustos had wondered off.

"You're giving an awful lot of information on your friend to someone you don't know."

"We are a strange people, Doctor. If Dracustos trusts someone, so shall we."

The Draconian sat silently and alone at the picnic table, staring solemnly at the sushi in front of him. He hardly noticed the Feydragon that landed beside him, the small reptile cautiously hopping towards the halfbreed. It chirped at him, catching his attention.

"Oh, hey there. You want something?" The creature gestured with its head at his food, then chirped some more. Dracustos chuckled. "Alright, here you go." He set a piece in front of the Fey, and it bounced with glee before fluttering off with its meal.

He soon sensed David nearby. The man sat next to him but no words were exchanged, resulting in an awkward silence.

"So... is there anything you actually do here, other than just hang out?" Macbeth finally asked.

"Mh-hm," Dracustos answered with a mouthful of sticky rice and raw fish, nodding his head. He swallowed. "Fire duty. Sometimes the Feys get rowdy and accidentally start one."

"Feys?" As he asked this, one of the dragons landed on his shoulder, nearly startling him. "Oh-!" This earned a chuckle from the halfbreed.

"That's a Feydragon, Fey for short. They're also called Fairy Dragons." David stared at the colorful winged beast as it looked him over. It glanced at his hands, then chirped at him expectantly.

"Uh, what do I do?" Dracustos grinned; it was somewhat amusing to see the man in such a situation.

"She wants food. Here." He gave the doctor a piece of sushi, and he in turn offered it to the dragon. She sniffed the food before taking it up in her jaws. But she didn't leave. She simply sat on David's shoulder, food in her paws as she nibbled away.

"Heh, looks like she likes you. Don't be surprised if she follows you around." Dr. Macbeth kept his eyes on the creature for a moment, then cautiously reached a hand towards it. The Fey paused her nibbling to sniff his hand before allowing him to scratch her chin.

"Interesting creature... Can they be trained?"

"Well, yes. Though they seem feral, their intelligence borders on being sentient. You can even teach one to speak English or other languages."

"So, like a parrot or child?"

"I guess you could say that." The Feydragon finished off the last little bite of sushi and cleaned her paws. After looking at the face of her perch for a moment, she rubbed her head on his cheek with something like a purr. Dr. Macbeth was surprised for a second, then chuckled.

"It never occurred to me that the mighty, fire-breathing beasts of legend could be so small and gentle. Then again, I didn't know they existed until I met you." A half-hearted laugh came from Dracustos.

"If it's a mighty fire-breather you want, you should see my father! He usually comes to visit at least once during the festival, though he'll more than likely disguise himself."

"Disguise? How on earth does he manage that?"

"Fire Dragons are well-acquainted with transformation magic; my father even more so given he's half Oriental, as they are the masters of such magic." He glanced at Macbeth to find the man staring at him as though lost.

"It seems I have much to learn about the world of dragons," he said, petting the Fey again. There was a ring, and he hurriedly reach into his pocket to retrieve his cell. "Hello? ... Alright, I'll be there as soon as I can." He put the cell away. "Duty calls. Oh, uh, could you...?" He gestured towards the Fey still sitting on his shoulder. Dracustos nodded and began making the same chirping sounds the small reptile

made. It caught her attention and her ears perked up as she listened, then she hopped down with a flutter of her colorful wings.

"I might come back later if I have time."

"You just might; we don't fully shut things down until 11:00." David nodded before taking his leave. The Feydragon watched him go for a moment before she too left, and Dracustos was left alone.

David did return later that day, but Dracustos was nowhere to be found. He stopped by Iroh's booth so as to hopefully gain a clue to the Draconian's whereabouts.

"He's vanished, eh? Guess that explains why I haven't seen him in a while," the old man said, stroking his long white beard. "But now that I think about it... he's probably at the graveyard. He usually visits on the day of the anniversary, but he's been so occupied with other things he didn't get to. Go look there; if you don't find him, check his house."

Dr. Macbeth leaned against the tree, watching Dracustos from a distance. Sure enough, the halfbreed was among the tombstones. He sat in front of one, half-heartedly plucking at the chords of a guitar.

"So attached... almost as if he were a child..." the doctor mumbled to himself.

"He's younger than you might think." David quickly turned to find a man approaching. He opened his mouth to ask who he was, then took in the stranger's appearance. He was as tall as Macbeth himself, if not taller, a black trenchcoat covering a grey long-sleeve shirt. A pair of blue jeans and sneakers completed the fashion statement. His hair was like fire; yellow at the base, fading to red at the ends. This made his light blue eyes stand out, making for a steely gaze.

"... I assume you're his father?" The figure closed his eyes with a grin and a chuckle.

"Is it that obvious?"

"Not really. If anything, the hair gives it away." There was a moment of silence, and David turned back around. "What you said a moment ago... what exactly do you mean? Does he age differently, or..."

"In a way." Caesitus moved to stand beside him. "He may be an adult in your human years, but given the lifespan of my kind... he's practically still a toddler."

"Is that so?" A soft wind blew, rustling the leaves of the tree the two stood under... and with it came a gentle, sorrowful tune.

*"I never felt
That it was wise
To wish too much
To dream too big
Would only lead*

To being crushed

*"When I met you
You weren't afraid
Of anything
You taught me how
To leave the ground
To use my wings*

*"I never thought a hero
Would ever come my way
But more than that
I never thought
You'd be taken away*

*"Now it's cold without you here
It's like winter lasts all year
But your star's still in the sky
So I won't say goodbye
I don't have to say goodbye*

*"My days of doubt
Were in the past
With you around
You helped me feel
I had a place
Direction found*

*"You showed me that
A greater dream
Can be achieved
Enough resolve
Will conquer all
If we believe*

*"The light you gave to guide me
Will never fade away
But moving forward never felt
As hard as today*

*"Now it's cold without you here
It's like winter lasts all year
But your star's still in the sky
So I won't say goodbye
I don't have to say goodbye..."*

David sighed, then began to make his way to Dracustos. Caesitus grabbed his arm.

"Just leave him be; he needs some alone time." He received a shake of the head as the doctor brushed his hand away.

"Perhaps that is the problem: he's been alone for much of his life. He may seem like he wants to be by himself, but what he *needs* is someone to be there for him."

"Then go ahead," the dragon replied with a shrug. "He has a bit of a grudge against me for leaving." David glanced at Dracustos, and when he turned back to reply he found Caesitus had vanished. He sighed again before making his way across the hallowed ground. Dracustos didn't acknowledge his presence; in fact, he didn't even realize the man was there.

"I didn't know you could sing, Draco." The halfbred flinched at the voice, then peered over his shoulder, watching David as he sat down next to him.

"What are you doing here?" he asked quietly, turning his gaze to the ground. Dr. Macbeth was silent for a moment as he looked over the tombstone in front of them.

Here lies the heart of Rejection

*Leia
1980 - 2008*

"I thought you could use a friend," he replied. For a moment nothing more was said. "You were young when it happened, correct?" Dracustos nodded, and again there was silence.

"... I felt lost for a long time... sometimes I still do."

"And what gets you back in the right direction?" A faint smile found its way on the Draconian's lips, and he looked towards the sky.

"My people. People like you. When I see others doing good in the world, I want to be part of it. It gives me hope that humanity isn't complete garbage." The smile faded, and his gaze wandered to the tombstone. "... I miss her..." David put an arm around the halfbreed, as if comforting a child.

"I'm sure everyone else in your town does as well. But look at them now. They're still a happy people, and what's more, they have a guardian now. Rejection may have lost one great person, but it gained another. Dracustos... I'm not saying you need to forget. You just need to move on."

"Heh... I know..." Detecting a slight crack in his comrade's voice, Dr. Macbeth looked up to find tears streaming down the Draconian's cheek. He gave the scaly being a few pats.

"There there... it's alright..."

November 6th, Rejection's Herb Fields

David casually snaked his way through the crowds, partly enjoying the fair, and partly looking for Dracustos. He had brought Zoe along this time, but she had wandered off and was lost to the sea of people. Though it was night, the place was still festive. The Feydragons added to the energetic atmosphere, their bioluminescent wing and tail tips replacing the lights of summer fireflies. Music filled the air, though it wasn't of this land; it was Celtic in nature, and with it was a rhythmic stomping and clacking that echoed across the field like thunder.

Macbeth spotted Iroh's booth and approached to ask the old man of the halfbreed's whereabouts, but found it to be empty. Zoe was suddenly at his side, pulling at his arm.

"David come on, you've got to see this!" she giggled. Before any sort of reply could be uttered, the man found himself being led to the stage. He soon spotted what she found so amusing: Dracustos was bouncing among the wooden planks in a riverdance with a line of people, smiling like an idiot. Dr. Macbeth found himself grinning, though not entirely from amusement; the Draconian seemed joyful despite the events of yesterday.

The music soon ended, along with the dance, and the people onstage gave a bow before leaving to refresh themselves. Dracustos spotted the two Coils and made his way to them, greeting them with a nod.

"I didn't know you could dance, either," David commented with a smirk. The blue beast gave a slightly embarrassed smile.

"Well, my mother was half Irish, so... Oh! You want to join us?" Dracustos asked. David shook his head.

"Sorry, I'm not much for such things," he replied. The halfbreed turned his gaze to Zoe, and offered a hand.

"How about you?" She cast glances between the clawed hand, its owner, and David.

"I- uh- don't know how..."

"That's fine, I can teach you." The girl glanced at David again. He gestured for her to go, and she hesitantly took the offered hand. Now it was her turn to be led through the crowd, and as she stepped onto the stage she felt some anxiety take hold. So many people were watching her...

"Hey." Her head was gently turned away from the crowd so all she saw was Dracustos. "Don't pay attention to them. Just watch me." She nodded, then listened and watched as he instructed her. She tripped a couple times at first, but after a few minutes she was trotting and stomping as though she were Irish herself.

Dr. Macbeth chuckled. It was quite entertaining to watch his Serpents make merriment in such a manner.

"Looks like your little talk with him worked." Caesitus moved up to stand beside the doctor. "I haven't seen him like that in a long time."

"Sometimes one just needs a shoulder to cry on." Bouts of laughter came from the audience, and Macbeth turned his attention back to the stage. Dracustos was riverdancing by himself, but this time he was doing it on all fours while Zoe was doubled over with laughter. Caesitus chuckled.

"What a goofball..."

Zoe lay back in the grass with her eyes closed. Beside her sat David, and next to him Dracustos. The Fey from the previous day sat on the doctor's shoulder, enjoying an occasional chin-scratching or patting of the head. The stage had been left to whomever had the guts to tread upon it to dance or sing. Currently, a group of five Africans were singing one of their tribal songs, while five more danced along.

"So... you seem well considering yesterday," David commented. The halfbreed didn't answer at first.

"I did some thinking... Sometimes we gotta leave stuff behind. We can't grow up and we can't move on unless we leave some stuff behind. We can't just do the same things over and over again because then we don't grow as people." Macbeth nodded, pleased that Dracustos had found some inner peace. The next thing he knew, the Draconian was making his way to the now empty stage. He gave a whistle.

"Hey Sam! Get me a guitar would you?" he called. Seconds later a young woman popped out from backstage holding the instrument and setting down a stool, waiting for Dracustos. She grinned as the scaly hands took it.

"What are you planning, you lizard?" she asked sarcastically. The half-dragon gave her a playful shove.

"Just one last song before things shut down for the night," he replied. "Now get outta here, you're distracting from the main event."

"Whatever you say, hotshot," Sam giggled with a roll of her eyes. As she left Dracustos took a seat, testing the chords to make sure they were tuned properly. When he was satisfied he began to play a tune, one many people recognised, and they sang along with him.

***"When life leaves you high and dry
I'll be at your door tonight
If you need help, if you need help
I'll shut down the city lights,
I'll lie, cheat, I'll beg and bribe
To make you well, to make you well***

***"When enemies are at your door
I'll carry you away from more
If you need help, if you need help
Your hope dangling by a string
I'll share in your suffering
To make you well, to make you well***

***Give me reasons to believe
That you would do the same for me***

***“And I would do it for you, for you
Baby I'm not moving on
I'll love you long after you're gone
For you, for you
You would never sleep alone
I'll love you long after you're gone
And long after you're gone, gone, gone***

***“When you fall like a statue
I'm gon' be there to catch you
Put you on your feet, on your feet
And if your well is empty
Not a thing will prevent me
Tell me what you need, what do you need
I surrender honestly
You've always done the same for me***

***“So I would do it for you, for you
Baby I'm not moving on
I'll love you long after you're gone
For you, for you
You would never sleep alone
I'll love you long after you're gone
And long after you're gone, gone, gone***

***“You're my back bone, you're my cornerstone
You're my crutch when my legs stop moving
You're my head start, you're my rugged heart
You're the pokes that I've always needed***

***“Like a drum baby don't stop beating
Like a drum baby don't stop beating
Like a drum baby don't stop beating
Like a drum my heart never stops beating***

***“For you, for you
Baby I'm not moving on
I'll love you long after you're gone
For you, for you
You would never sleep alone
I'll love you long after you're gone
For you, for you
Baby I'm not moving on
I'll love you long after you're gone
For you, for you***

*You would never sleep alone
I'll love you long, long after you're gone*

*“Like a drum baby don't stop beating
Like a drum baby don't stop beating
Like a drum baby don't stop beating
Like a drum my heart never stops beating for you
And long after you're gone, gone, gone
I'll love you long after you're gone gone gone...”*

Pyramid

December 22, Healing Hands Clinic

The group of three sat quietly at the round table, waiting for the last member to arrive. Dr. Macbeth was going over the information he planned to brief them on, mumbling to himself about this and that. To his right sat Zoe, and his left Dracustos.

The halfbreed yawned; he was taking a much-needed nap when the doctor had requested their presence. He took another sip of his black tea, hoping either it will wake him up, or he can go home after this meeting. He glanced at his comrades. Macbeth was still fiddling with papers, obviously to keep himself occupied, while Zoe twirled her hair between her fingers. Neither seemed up for conversation, though Dracustos didn't either, but at the same time he couldn't stand the silence.

He began to hum a tune, the theme of Undertale; partly because he was absolute trash, and partly because he just enjoyed its melody. It caught the others' attention, David seeming to relax a bit while Zoe raised her head. They barely noticed Dante walk in.

“Your garbage is overflowing, Draco,” he commented as he took a seat. The halfbreed stopped humming and looked the man over, then blew a puff of smoke in his direction. Dr. Macbeth cleared his throat and stood.

“Right, if I may have your attention...I've received word from a Serpent that a father-daughter team of archeologists have vanished while investigating a pyramid they discovered in the desert.” He pushed forward an audio box. “Upon investigation of their camp, this audio was found on the drives.” There was a click as he pressed a button. The voice that came from it sounded exhausted... with undertones of fear.

"My name is Miles Holden. I was a professor at Princeton University. I am trapped in the excavation site with my daughter, Sarah Holden, and our cameraman Fitz Simmons... and we need help. Our tech specialist Michael Trek, and documentary film maker Cindy Marsh... are dead, killed by an animal we cannot identify. This pyramid - unlike any other structure I've encountered - seems to have been built with the intention of keeping whatever is inside from escaping. If you come down here... bring guns." There was another click as the player stopped, and the room was silent. Dr. Macbeth placed his hands on the table.

"Now, normally I would leave finding archeologists as work for the authorities, but after hearing this I believe something of supernatural nature is involved. We are to go in, investigate, and extract any survivors. If we come across this creature, we meet it with full force." Dante raised a hand.

"Question: why don't we just seal off the pyramid? Ya know, to keep the thing from getting out?"

"If it gets out, we'll take care of it. Our first priority is finding Dr. Miles or whomever is still alive. Now, seeming as they got lost, each of you will have an earpiece with a GPS tracker should we get separated. We head out tomorrow night."

"We better get back before Christmas Eve. I've got a schedule to keep."

December 23, 250 miles south of Cairo, Egypt

David checked over his Winchester one last time under the shade of the tarp. Dante was checking his weapons as well, while Zoe sat quietly sipping a Dr. Pepper. She glanced past them at Dracustos; he was surveying the area around the exposed tip of the immense structure. She squinted, thinking she saw a golden shimmer by his shoulder-

Someone unfamiliar moved past her, and she quickly looked up to find two soldiers approaching the doctor. He looked up at the men in camo uniform and grinned.

"Ah, Sahdid, Lazar!" he greeted, shaking the offered hands. "Glad you two could make it. We could use your assistance."

"Wait, are they coming with us?" Zoe questioned.

"Only one will be joining us inside. The other will keep an eye on the gear out here," David answered. He led the man away, and Dante turned to find the Draconian was standing next to him.

"So, where'd you piss off to?"

“Dr. Miles was right about this place being strange. Most pyramids have four sides. This one has three.” The agent furrowed his brows in confusion.

“So, what, the Illuminati built it?” Dracustos shook his head.

“Your dank memes are showing, Dante.”

Dracustos hung back from the group as they adjusted their headlamps, the twitching of his tail tip showing his unease. A faint golden glimmer showed for a moment, and his ear twitched. He mumbled something in Dragontongue, and it faded away.

“Dracustos?” He looked down at David, the man’s brow furrowed in concern. “Is everything alright?” The halfbreed was hesitant to answer, his reply laced with reluctance.

“David... I *really* don’t think we should go in there.”

“Why is that?”

“There’s... something... I don’t quite know how to explain it. But even from here I can sense a great power. An ancient one. If we come across that creature, I’m uncertain if our weapons will have any effect on it. We should just seal the entrance and make sure no one else enters.”

“Dracustos, we need to search for-”

“You don’t understand. Look, these structures were believed to be the dwelling places of the Gods, which were often depicted as benign and giving. Whatever it is I can feel... it’s not benign and giving. I know you don’t want to hear this, but... there’s a very low chance anyone is still alive.” A thoughtful sigh came from the Healer, but then he straightened into his regal stand.

“You can stay out here if you wish, but we’re looking for Dr. Miles and the others.” It was the Draconian’s turn to sigh, and he moved past Macbeth to kneel at a loop stake that the others had missed. A carabiner was still hooked to the loop, and to the carabiner a heavy-duty fishing line was tied.

“It’s obviously very easy to get lost,” he said aloud for everyone to hear. “They didn’t go very deep inside, but their line was chewed by something. Don’t stray too far from each other.” Dracustos pulled the stake from the ground and sniffed it, then stood and walked past the Coils to the entrance and kneeled again, examining the ground. He began to go into the tunnel, but found the ceiling was very low, forcing him to walk on all fours. After giving his medic pack a slight adjustment, Dr. Macbeth followed, then Zoe, Dante, and Sahdid.

"Why is the lizard leading us?" the Striker asked sarcastically. The tunnel opened up, allowing enough room for the halfbreed to stand mostly straight. To the left was the actual entrance to the pyramid, at which Dracustos knelt at.

"I'm not leading," he replied, rubbing his hand in the sand and giving it a sniff, "I'm tracking." He looked up at the hieroglyphs that were so carefully carved above the open shaft, running a clawed finger along them. "It seems this is a very special pyramid."

"Care if I ask why?" the doctor inquired.

"This is the temple of Osiris, God of the Afterlife. He was also considered to be the first Pharaoh."

"I didn't know you could read hieroglyphs, Dracustos." The halfbreed gave no reply, simply standing before crawling into the small entryway. For a second the others hung back.

"Is he always like that?" Dante asked. He received a shake of the head.

"No. Something about this place bothers him; he doesn't think we should be going in." The doctor moved to follow the blue beast, and Dante sighed.

"Well that's reassuring," he mumbled.

They had only walked for a few minutes when Dracustos stopped. He turned towards the three different halls before him, sniffing the air. He suddenly looked up. The others followed his gaze, their lights revealing a hole that led to a room.

"The apex..." Dr. Macbeth opened his mouth to question what the Draconian was talking about, but before he could utter a sound the beast jumped, barely making a clean fit through. David frowned, somewhat annoyed at his comrade's behavior.

"Dracustos," he called, trying to peer into the room, "I understand this place has you on edge, but I'm not too fond of how you're acting." Again he received no answer, and was about to attempt in entering the hole when the scaly form dropped back down. He turned, holding a few ancient weapons. He offered what looked like some sort of axe to the doctor.

"Here, you might need this." A glance was cast between the weapon and Dracustos.

"Draco, we can't take those. They're-

"Probably the only thing effective against whatever is in here."

"More effective than a gun?" Dante stepped forward, taking the weapon and examining it.

"I told David before; there's no guarantee our weapons will work. Best to have one of these just in case." There was a moment of silence before the old weapons were taken. Dante kept the [bardiche](#) he took, Dr. Macbeth chose the [scimitar](#). Zoe picked a simple [dagger](#), and Sahdid a [spear](#). A [polearm](#) was left, which Dracustos claimed.

"If you are satisfied, could we please get back to the task at hand?" the Healer implored. Dracustos nodded before turning and continuing deeper inside the structure.

After a few more minutes the halfbreed stopped again, his breathing becoming audible whiffs. His head tilted in confusion before he knelt to the ground, sniffing as he inspected the loose dirt on the floor.

"Strange... the trail seems to end here," he said.

"The scent probably faded," Macbeth suggested. Draco shook his head.

"Pyramids are pretty airtight, so that's not likely. Have you noticed there were no tracks?" The doctor opened his mouth for another suggestion, then paused, realizing he was right. "It's as if any trace of our archeologists has been erased in here. As if to cover their tracks so something else couldn't follow them out."

"If you can't track them... how are we supposed to find anyone?" Zoe asked. Draco stood.

"We'll have to guess." Dante peered down one of the halls.

"Hey, what's that?" He began to trek to a room, the rest of the group tagging along. The space was large, and on the other side was a dark mangled mass. Dante knelt down and picked it up. "Treads, wires, hydraulics... I think this was a rover."

"Likely Dr. Holden's," Macbeth proposed.

"Damn, it's messed up pretty bad. Something didn't like it." Some sand fell from the ceiling with a light rumble, and everyone looked up to find it was cracking. Dante quickly dropped the destroyed machine and backed away as pieces fell. The floor beneath their feet began to crack in response, and everyone froze.

"Well... this is a thing," Dante commented. He looked at the doctor. "Any ideas?" Macbeth thought for a moment before turning his eyes to the Draconian.

"Draco, think you could teleport us out?"

"No," he answered, shaking his head. "The sudden changes in pressure would cause the floor to give."

"OK, what about flying?"

"That would cause pressure changes too." David looked at the floor in thought.

"Alright then, we'll just have to back out slowly. Zoe-" he looked up and gestured for her to approach, "-you first. Try not to step on the cracks." She nodded, obvious worry on her face as she carefully walked to the doctor. "Dante, you next." As the man began to tread as lightly as he could, the floor continued to crack. More debris fell from above, adding to the weight.

The ground suddenly shifted, and for a split second everyone was still as thunderous rumbles sounded.

"Shit- RUN!"

Everyone spun towards the exit, but hardly made it two steps. The floor gave way, dropping the group into darkness.

"Hey, Draco, wake up." Dracustos stirred with a groan. His head was pounding, and his body sore.

"Careful Dante, he could go Feral."

"Relax Doc, he's not growing any horns." The halfbreed's eyes fluttered open, squinting at the light of the man's headlamp. "You alright, Draco?"

"Mmmh... yeah," he answered, sitting up and rubbing his head. He felt something warm trickle down his face.

"Looks like that rock of your is bleeding." Clawed fingers gently touched the gem; sure enough, it had been cracked and was cutting into the surrounding skin. Dracustos growled in annoyance.

"That's just fantastic," he grumbled. He attempted at wiping the blood away, but more ran down to replace it. With a helping hand from Dante he stood, then looked around the room. The

soldier sat off to the side near the wall, Zoe standing near David and rubbing her arm.
“Everyone alright?”

“Nothing serious, just some cuts and bruises,” Macbeth answered. Sahdid looked up at the Gladiators.

“Could be worse,” he chuckled, his words laced with accent.

Some sand drifted down, and suddenly a large slab of the roof fell and pinned the man to the floor by his leg, the thud drowning out a sickening crunch. Zoe gasped in fright and covered her mouth with her hands, staring in horror as the soldier screamed in pain and panic. David rushed to him, trying to get the man to calm down so he could help.

Seeing Zoe’s discomfort, Dracustos gently turned her away from the scene and tried to lead her away. But the girl’s knees refused to work properly, and she ended up sitting on the ground. The halfbreed looked back at David to find him and Dante trying to move the slab, and obviously failing. Dante stepped back.

“Hate to be a downer, but there’s no damn way we’re gonna move that,” he panted. The doctor furrowed his brow, then turned to the Draconian.

“Draco, think you can move this?” At first there was no answer.

“Only one way to find out.” He gave Zoe a pat on the shoulder before leaving her, and as he approached his horns began to grow. He hooked his talons under the three-foot-thick stone and began to lift. It slowly rose a few inches before Dracustos stopped, unable to move it any further and unwanting to let it drop. Dante stepped in, then David’s Reflections. With their combined effort they barely managed to flip over the stone, revealing the bloody mess that was Sahdid’s leg.

“My body’s going to pay for that later,” Dracustos mumbled as he rubbed his arm. He staggered a bit as Feral State receded, and he sat down next to Zoe with a huff.

After a quick inspection Dr. Macbeth sighed. The bones were crushed and shattered, skin and muscle torn from blood vessels bursting with pressure. He couldn’t fix this, not with what he had on him. He had to do something quickly before the man bled out; the red liquid was already forming a large pool at his feet, hiding the splatter that had come before.

Macbeth ran his fingers through his hair with another frustrated sigh, then raised his eyes to Dracustos and signaled for him to come over. The halfbreed silently obeyed, Dante taking his place next to Zoe. The doctor stood and spoke in hushed tones.

“I assume your swords are fairly clean, correct?”

"Yeah..."

"How fast can you cauterize a wound after using them?" The Draconian drew a sword.

"I can do both."

"Good." The Healer turned back and knelt beside his patient, digging through his pack to pull out some bandages and medicine. "Sorry Sahdid." The already wide-eyed Serpent glanced between the doctor and the sword as flames hissed to life on its golden blade, his eyes growing even bigger. He opened his mouth to protest, but had no chance to say a word. Dracustos swung his flaming blade.

Screams echoed through the dark space. Zoe covered her ears and shut her eyes, the sound bringing unpleasant memories. Dante frowned, then put an arm around her and pulled her close.

"You alright, kiddo?" After a heavy breath she gave an unsettled nod.

With a sigh Dracustos sheathed his sword as David pulled bandages from his pack and began to wrap the blackened stump.

"You guys should wait here while I carry him topside-"

"No." The doctor pulled out a bottle of water and handed it to Sahdid. "We shouldn't move him for a while."

"So we're just going to sit here until he's ready to move?"

"We're going to continue with the mission. Sahdid will just have to wait here." Dracustos was silent. He wanted to protest leaving the man on his own; not that they wouldn't be able to find him again, but whatever creature in this structure might find him. And he was in no condition to fend for himself. But then again, he would only slow them down if he was brought with them.

Draco sighed again.

"Fine. But we need to find a way out of this room, because right now the only exit is up." Dr. Macbeth stood and dusted himself off, then looked around.

"Perhaps there lies a means of escape," he suggested, pointing at a wall to the right. A section of it seemed to be held up by thick, wooden beams. Dracustos looked over the carvings. "Well, what does it say?"

“... It's a warning.”

“I assume it's about that “ancient power” you can sense down here?” Once again, no answer was given.

“Warning or not, it's the only other way out.” The Draconian reached for a beam, paused, then proceeded to remove them. After tossing a few aside he inspected the wall, pushing against it to find anything loose. A section gave way, and he pushed it from its slot to reveal a hole. He peered through the hole for a moment.

“Looks like this is our way out,” he stated, stepping to the side. Macbeth nodded, then gave Dante a whistle to get his attention before signaling for the man to get moving. Dante mumbled something to Zoe, and they both got to their feet and waited by the exit.

David pulled an extra lamp from his pack and turned it on, setting it next to Sahdid.

“Don't want you sitting in the dark, now do we?” He received no reply, just a scared expression. “Don't worry, we'll come back for you. Just hold out here for a while, alright?” Sahdid nodded hesitantly, and the Healer stood and left the soldier's side. He adjusted his rifle before hesitantly going through the hole, followed by Dante and Zoe. Dracustos paused, casting Sahdid one last glance before leaving.

They rounded a corner to find a stairwell going down into darkness. They began to descend - then stopped. There was shouting in Egyptian tongue.

“Is that Lazar?” Zoe asked. Dracustos rotated his ears, trying to pinpoint the echoing voice. The shouting turned to screaming. He whipped around.

“That's not Lazar - it's Sahdid!” He went into a full sprint back up the stairs, Dr. Macbeth quick to follow. The halfbreed slipped through the crawl space, a coppery scent greeting his nostrils - then froze. David stopped next to him, seeing the shock in his eyes.

“What is it-” He turned his gaze to the scene. The floor was painted with blood, and Sahdid was missing. All that remained was a spear and bloodied lamp. “My lord...”

“Hey, what's going on in there?” Dante poked his head in, then poked it right back out after seeing the mess.

Dracustos knelt at the reddened floor, then noticed a trail. He followed it to a tunnel on the other side of the room that went up, one side darkened by blood. He cursed himself for having missed it, and for not protesting leaving Sahdid behind. He would have been safer with them, but instead they practically gave him to the creature.

David placed a hand on his shoulder.

"We can't save everyone," he said quietly. Dracustos snorted.

"Doesn't mean we can't try."

Zoe and Dante looked up as the two left the room.

"What happened? Is Sahdid OK?" Draco glanced at Dante; obviously the man had not told her what he'd seen.

"Sahdid's dead. Whatever got to Dr. Miles' group is coming after us now." There was a moment of silence, glances being cast around. "Come on, we have a mission to finish."

The Coils continued down the stairs in silence. Dr. Macbeth glanced to the side and noticed claw marks trailing down the wall. He knew they didn't come from Dracustos.

The stairs led to a hall only a few feet long... and a dead end. It didn't take long to find another path; to their left was an open shaft.

"Looks like this is the only way to go," Dracustos said, stepping to the side. David flashed his light down the tunnel, then brought his rifle forward and crawled in. He was followed by Zoe, then Dante, and finally Dracustos.

After a few minutes of crawling, the halfbreed paused.

"Wait, everyone stop." They obeyed, craning their necks in an attempt to look behind. The Draconian listened for a moment before quickly turning back around. "Something's behind us- go!" He sent a torrent of fire down the shaft as the others continued forward with haste, occasionally shouting at whomever was in front of them to move faster.

The fire didn't stop whatever was behind them. Dracustos glanced back and noticed several pairs of eyes glowing in the firelight, steadily closing the distance between them.

Dr. Macbeth noticed they were approaching the end of the shaft and tried to move faster. He could hear the creatures behind them, their hissing and scuffling growing louder as they drew near. He glanced back as the half-dragon spat more fire, and when he righted himself he was startled to find a face looking at him. He soon realized it was familiar.

“Lazar!” The soldier offered a hand, and the Healer quickly took it. After being aided in his exit he took a couple steps back and aimed his rifle down the shaft, waiting for his comrades to get out of the way.

Lazar pointed his automatic down the tunnel after the last Serpent slithered out and pulled the trigger. The only sound that was heard for the next few seconds was gunfire before the weapon began clicking at the empty clip. Lazar peered into the shaft, then quickly stepped aside as catlike creatures - near hairless with patches of ragged fur - fled from the opening with panicked yowls and hisses. After letting them pass he went back and looked down the shaft again.

Dracustos’ scales stood on end. There was something else.

“Get away from there!” he shouted.

Something large, hidden by the shadows, grabbed Lazar by the midsection and tried to pull him in. He was pressed against the wall, unable to even attempt at escaping. Dracustos and Dante rushed forward, one trying to keep the man’s spine straight while the other attempted to assault whatever held him.

David was ready with his rifle, but couldn’t get a clear shot. Zoe was too horrified to move.

Lazar’s spine suddenly gave way with a sickening crackle, and his body folded in half as the beast dragged him into the shaft. Dante expressed his displeasure with an extravagant “Holy shit!”, and Macbeth waved a hand at him.

“Everyone back, turn off your lights,” he urged.

For a couple minutes it was silent and dark. Dracustos listened intently, his sharp vision piercing the darkness as he stared at the opening, waiting for any sign of the beast he had sensed. But nothing came. It was silent. It was dark.

“It’s gone for now,” he informed. Dante let out a breath he’d been holding, then ran his fingers through his hair with frustration as he began pacing.

“OK, I know I signed up for this... but I did *not* sign up for this,” he fumed. His eyes landed on the halfbreed. “What the fuck was that- *thing*?”

“I don’t know, didn’t get a good look at it,” Dracustos answered calmly. “Whatever it is, it’s big and it’s hostile.”

"No shit Sherlock."

"Dante, calm down," Dr. Macbeth ordered, "we need a level head if we're going to get out of here." Dracustos waved a hand, and a few balls of fire formed and floated above the Coils, giving some extra light.

David glanced at Zoe. The girl was frozen in place, still horrified from what she had seen. He sighed, then made his way to her side to comfort her.

Dracustos spotted a large mural on the wall and went to investigate. He soon found Dante at his side.

"Please tell me this gives us a clue of what we're up against, or at least how to get out of here." There was silence as the scaly figure looked over the picture.

"This panel depicts the Final Judgement, the weighing of souls," he answered.

"What?"

"It's from the Egyptian Book of the Dead. When a person died, they passed into a room and were brought before Osiris and a panel of judges. Next to them was a massive scale. The god Anubis would then weigh his heart against Maat, the Goddess of Truth. If it balanced perfectly, you would be accepted into the Afterlife."

"I thought the Book of the Dead was just full of spells and incantations," David called. Draco shook his head.

"It's more than that. It's a guide to immortality." He gestured to the mural. "This was central to Egyptian philosophy. This... is the final milestone." Dante glanced between the wall and the halfbreed.

"You don't believe all of that, do you?" Dracustos looked at him for a moment, then back at the carvings.

"*They* believed it." There was a moment of silence. "We should go, before that thing comes back." David nodded, then encouraged Zoe to get moving. There was one other way out of the room; a doorway that led down another hall. Lining the walls were wildcat heads, their jaws agape in fierce snarls. Dracustos went first, followed by Zoe, David, and Dante.

The agent spotted what looked like carved wooden slabs, each hanging on an old frayed rope. He held one to get a better look at it.

"Huh, wonder what these are for," he said to no one in particular. Dracustos glanced back, then fully turned.

"Don't touch those!" Delta was quick to release the carved wood and back away. The item swung before the rope snapped, and it clanked to the floor. Behind them a stone door slid down to seal them in, and there was an echoing of ancient mechanical mechanisms. Sand then began to pour from the cat's mouths.

"*Dons'ik*- run!" Dracustos shouted. He thundered down the hall, trying to keep pace with the others so as to not leave them behind.

The sand was pouring fast and the hall was long. As the level of the grainy earth rose, it became more difficult to move. Eventually, Dante got stuck. The sand was rising faster than he could pull himself free.

"David! David I can't move!" he shouted. It was hard to be heard over the roar of sand, but the doctor did hear him, and he turned back around to aid his Serpent. The earth was already up to Dante's waist.

Draco and Zoe kept running. The halfbreed was a couple feet ahead of her, hoping the other end wasn't blocked off as well. The next thing he knew, he was out of the hall, and he skidded to a halt, the loose grains under his feet nearly causing him to slide off the platform and into a pit of stakes. He began to turn around-

Zoe still had her head down as she plowed into the Draconian, and they both fell. Zoe felt herself get shoved back and barely landed on the platform. Dracustos didn't have any time to right himself or spread his wings.

David was distracted by the roar for a split second, then turned back to Dante. Both men were digging away at the sand, but it was being replaced faster than it was being moved. The doctor could feel that Dante was beginning to panic. He resorted to grabbing a cold, robotic arm and pulling, telling Dante to wiggle like a worm. A thought crossed his mind; they were in trouble on both sides... and there was almost nothing he could do.

Zoe stared down at the unmoving body of her comrade, heart in her throat. She called to him, but there was no response. It was difficult to see any signs of life, as the throw of her headlamp faded at the ground. But then she heard something, something like a groan. Dracustos moved; not much, but enough to be noticed. Zoe gave a hopeful gasp.

"Draco- Draco hold on, I'll-" She looked behind her. David was still trying to retrieve a now mostly buried Dante. She was torn. Either she could try to climb down to help Dracustos, or she could help David free Dante. After glancing back and forth, she stood.

"I'm going to help David- I'll be back as soon as I can!" she called. She turned and ran off into the tunnel.

Dracustos gave a pained snarl as he looked himself over. He had landed mostly sideways on the stakes. Two were in his chest, another through his midsection, and another through his right calf. He was sure there were a few through his left wingsail. A shimmering figure appeared in front of him, and he looked at it with tired eyes.

"Oh... there you are..." His ear twitched, catching the shouting of his comrades. "I need you to help them." Something like a whisper came from the sparkling entity. "I know you're not supposed to interfere, but please... just this once..." The shimmer remained for a moment, then zipped off towards the platform. There was a hiss, but not from Dracustos. He turned his attention to the wall where holes lined the floor, and from the holes came the catlike creatures from before. Their fur bristled excitedly at the chance of fresh meat.

David and Zoe's attempts to free Dante were failing, and time was not on their side. All that was visible of Dante now were the hands his comrades desperately clung to, and soon even those would become lost to the sands.

Something brushed past the Healer, and he glanced to the side to find a large serpentine body plunge into the grainy earth, its shimmering golden scales seeming to give off a warm glow. After a few seconds of squirming it retreated, and in its coils was a coughing Dante. The serpent gently set him on the floor, then set its gaze on David. He stared at it for a moment, somewhat hypnotised by its strange crown of horns and piercing light blue eyes.

"Uh... Thank you..." The reptile flicked its tongue out, nodded, and swiftly slithered away, spreading a pair of feathered wings as it got into the open, and it glittered out of sight. The doctor turned his attention to Dante, helping him to his feet.

"Are you alright?" he inquired. The agent brushed himself off, then began vigorously ruffling his hair.

"Eugh, I've got sand in places I didn't even know I had places," he croaked between coughs. Macbeth quietly sighed in relief, then quickly glanced around.

"Where's Dracustos?" Zoe's eyes widened as she remembered the halfbreed's situation, but as she opened her mouth to speak there was an orange light: firelight. Dr. Macbeth wasted no time sprinting out onto the platform. He looked down the pit to find the Knight of Nehushtan trying to fend off the cat creatures, still impaled by the sharpened wood. Dracustos tried to spit more fire, but the flames wavered and were doused by his own blood as he choked.

Macbeth whipped his rifle around, taking quick aim before popping off a shot. The bullet struck one of the cats in the head. It frightened the others, and they fled. Dante and Zoe came up behind him as he lowered himself over the edge, careful not to drop himself on a stake.

“Jesus...” Dante mumbled as he set eyes on Dracustos. The halfbreed weakly looked up at David.

“Hey Doc...” He winced at a wave of pain from speaking and coughed up more blood, a thick trail of the fluid running from his mouth. Dr. Macbeth gently cupped his hands around his head.

“Don’t talk, just- stay with me, alright?”

“*No promises...*” He frowned in concern; even the Knight’s telepathic voice sounded weak.

“Dante, get his waist; Zoe, his legs. Lift when I say.” The Serpents silently obeyed as David shifted to grip the beast’s chest. He hesitated for a moment before spawning a Reflection for extra hands. “Ready... Go!” The helping hands felt muscles tense from pain as they pulled up, a dog-like whine escaping the halfbreed’s throat as the stakes left his body. No sooner than he was set on the ground David began to examine him. His breathing had turned into shallow gasps for air. His wounds were bleeding profusely... particularly the hole that went through the middle of his chest.

Dr. Macbeth sighed. Not only would it take more than what he had on him to properly treat these wounds, he wanted to save something if they found any survivors. Now that he thought about it, that was a pretty big “if”. He had already lost two Serpents to the creature in this pyramid, and nearly lost another to a mere trap. If they could barely survive, perhaps Dracustos was right. Dr. Holden and his team may very likely be dead.

He shook his head. No time for such thoughts. He had to tend to his comrade’s injuries before he bled out... and before the beast of the pyramid found them.

“Draco, I need you to cauterize these first. ... Draco?” He turned his eyes to the Draconian’s face to find his eyes closed, and he realized his breathing had gone quiet. David leaned over to lightly pat the scaly cheek, a slight fear gripping his chest that he might lose a Coil. “Hey, Dracustos. Come on buddy, wake up.”

The half-dragon coughed and grimaced, blinking a few times as if confused. Sporadic breathing returning, he looked at the doctor.

“*Oh, sorry... blacked out there for a minute...*” he apologized before grimacing again. Once again Macbeth sighed.

"That's alright, that's alright. If you can, I need you to burn those wounds." There was a moment of silence as Dracustos lay his head down and closed his eyes, taking as deep a breath he could. Soon a sizzle came from the holes in his body, an unpleasant stench rising with the smoke. The halfbreed's face began to pinch up in pain once more, a low growl finding its way up his throat.

Dr. Macbeth had a thread and needle ready, making quick but refined work of stitching the wounds closed. Zoe and Dante sat by quietly as he worked, watching with worried eyes for a possible chance to help. The chance did come when he moved on to bandage the injuries, as Dracustos had passed out again and could not move of his own accord.

After packing his supplies back in the pack, David remained seated next to the beast before deciding to keep watch until he woke. As he got to his feet to patrol the room, Dante also stood, going to investigate the cat creature.

It was mostly hairless, its skin a very dark grey while its fur was black. Its head, though shaped like a feline, was more like a mask.

"Huh, ugly little bastard," he mumbled, nudging it with his hand. He squinted and tilted his head in question, then reached for its shoulder and pulled up a black feathered limb. "These little shits have wings," he announced, looking over the creature some more. Dracustos stirred.

"Wings you said?"

"Yeah."

"I think it's a Sphynx."

"A Sphynx? Don't those have like, human heads or whatever? Body of a lion?"

"They were merely depicted that way as a symbol of strength. In truth they are guardians of the Underworld." David paused his pacing, his thoughts going to the winged serpent that saved Dante.

"If those are Sphynxes, then what was that flying snake?" Dracustos grunted as he forced himself to sit up. The doctor was quick to protest the movement. "Take it easy, Dracustos. We'll move when you're ready." After letting out a heavy breath tainted with smoke, the halfbreed resorted to lying back down.

"His name is Rhambah. He's an Egyptian Amphiptere and servant of Horus. I asked him to come with me to translate. When Dr. Holden discovered this temple, he was sent to make sure its prisoner didn't escape. He's not to interfere with any actions done by humans."

"Then why did he help us?"

"I asked him to. A favor, as one dragon to another." After a moment of silence, Dracustos sat up again, grimacing at the pain with a hiss. *"We should get going."* Dr. Macbeth put his Winchester back in its holster.

"Are you sure you're ready?" he asked as he approached. A sarcastic grin was the response.

"No. It would be a few hours before I'm actually good to go. But it's not a good idea to stay in one place for too long." Recalling the mess that had been made of Sahdid, David nodded and signaled for Dante to help.

"I only saw one other way out," he surmised, gesturing with his head towards the wall where the Sphynxes had come from. There was another shaft a few feet above the ground. Dante shook his head.

"No, nope, there's no way I'm going into another tunnel. Not after what happened last time," he protested.

"It's the only way for us to go, Dante, and probably the easiest for Dracustos to traverse in his condition." The man cast a glance between the opening and his wounded teammate, then sighed.

"Alright alright, give me an arm." Together he and Macbeth helped the Draconian to his feet, Zoe standing close by and watching their backs. When they got to the wall Dante left the reptile's side to shine his light down the shaft, making sure nothing was waiting in the shadows.

"Looks clear."

"Good. I need you two to go first. I'll stay back with Dracustos." After a nod Dante crawled in, followed by Zoe. Draco leaned against the wall as the doctor left him to enter the tunnel. The man paused, sitting on the edge. "Will you be alright on your own?"

"I'll be fine." Ironically to his claim, the half-dragon coughed up more blood. David furrowed his brow in concern, but nothing more could be done for his comrade's wounds.

A barrage of flustered curses could be heard as Macbeth and Dracustos exited the shaft. David was pacing furiously.

"How the *fuck* did we get back here? All that shit we just went through, and it was just a *fucking circle?!?*"

"Dante!" The doctor grabbed Rockwell's shoulder. "What did I say earlier about keeping a level head?" The frustrated man opened his mouth for a retort. Having nothing to say, he closed it and looked at the floor. David glanced around the room. Sure enough, they were back in the room where Lazar was taken. "You shouldn't be that surprised anyways. Pyramids are labyrinths, built to deter grave-robbers."

"Good to know," Dante fumed, brushing off the hand. He threw a glance towards the room before the sand trap. "I'm going to take a leak." As he walked off, coughing caught David's attention. The doctor turned to find Zoe trying to move Dracustos away from the shaft. He aided her silently, and after setting the halfbreed down he glanced around the room again.

"Let's take five. Ten if necessary," he said, looking over the wounded reptile. Nods were given from the Serpents and he wandered away, drawing his Winchester and keeping an eye on the two tunnels. Soon after, Dracustos blacked out again.

The Draconian blinked groggily, but was quickly fully awakened by a wave of pain through his chest as he took a breath. It was very painful to breathe.

He heard speaking in hushed tones and focused his ears to their source to find it was David and Dante. From the corner of his eye he saw the Striker glance at him.

"You think Draco's gonna make it, Doc? He looks pretty rough."

"... He is," Macbeth sighed. "One of those stakes punctured both lungs. It barely missed his heart. Needless to say, he's in critical condition. If we get him out of here alive, we need to get him to the Clinic immediately."

You'd be fine if he had listened to you... The voice pulled his attention away from the conversation. He hadn't heard it in a while... why has it returned?

Blaming others gets you nowhere. Just be quiet.

Something shifted next to Dracustos. He looked to the side to find Zoe sitting next to him, eyes darting between the two crawlspaces and Coils.

"Hey..." Her gaze shot to him. "*You need to relax, kiddo.*" She looked at the floor, pulling her knees up to her chest.

"We're trapped and we're being hunted," she replied quietly. "How do you expect me to relax?"

"Don't worry, I've got your back."

"But you're-" she started, looking at him again before turning a guilty eye to the floor. She sighed. "I'm sorry. If I was paying more attention-"

"Hey hey hey, don't go blaming yourself." Dracustos put a wing around her, the effort of moving an arm too painful. *"I will admit, this is probably the toughest scrape I've ever been in... But it's not your fault."* The girl remained silent, simply pulling her knees in tighter. The blue figure opened his mouth to attempt in physically speaking in hopes it would help shed Zoe's guilt, but before he could utter a sound Dr. Macbeth spoke up.

"There's been a change in plans. Our first priority is finding a way out and sealing the pyramid."

"If we can find a way out of this room first," Dante added, *"'cause I'm sure as hell not going back through that tunnel."*

"Lazar got in here somehow. We'll find a way out, Dante. Just let me..." He growled in his attempt to stand, staggered, and nearly fell had Macbeth not been there to catch him.

"You should stay down until we find another path," he suggested. The response came in a shake of the head.

"You guys don't have senses as attuned as mine. I could find something you've overlooked-" He paused, straightening up and rotating his ears. Dr. Macbeth lowered his voice.

"Is it back?"

"No..." Dracustos left his support to trudge his way back to the wall he sat against. It had statues carved into the stone; one of Osiris in the middle, and a servant on each side. He placed a hand over what looked like a simple border.

"David, come here," he requested, gesturing for the man to do the same. He silently did so. *"You feel that?"*

"Yeah... it's a vacuum. Which means there's an exit nearby." They both began searching and prodding around the carvings, looking for some way to move the wall.

"Hey, you two be careful. Bad things tend to happen when you touch things down here," Dante warned.

After a few seconds of searching, the doctor found something. He asked the halfbreed to back away, then pulled a hidden lever. The wall swung open, revealing a hellish decor of distorted skulls with mouths agape in silent, agonizing screams. Dracustos peered over David.

"Looks like this is the tomb- of course..." He slipped past the man, using the wall to support himself. The other Coils followed. *"Egyptians believed they were sent to the sky to dwell among the stars, so there would be a path for them to exit the pyramid. We just have to find it."*

This new tunnel they walked down was filled with mummified corpses, each one lying in its own slot in the wall. And there were claw marks.

They entered a large room lined with pillars, a stone coffin at its center. As Dracustos made his way around the tomb, he stopped.

"Doc... I found Sahdid..." Dr. Macbeth rounded the halfbreed's side to set eyes upon the former Serpent's corpse, but something was strange about it. He went to investigate, gently rolling the body over. It looked as though it was mummified, and there was a gaping hole where his heart should have been.

"Any idea what could have done this, Dracustos?"

"Not a clue." The Healer looked over the body again before standing and spawning a Reflection.

"Keep an eye out for anything big and hostile, as well as a possible exit," he ordered. The clone nodded and walked off. He then straightened up. "So, what do we do now we're in here?" Dracustos looked around the room.

"I'm honestly not too sure. But there is definitely a way out." Dante and Zoe came around the other corner.

"Anyone want to discuss the giant scale over there?" Rockwell asked, pointing a thumb to the end of the room. On the wall towards the head of the tomb was, in fact, a large scale. It stood at ten feet, its arms reaching around eight across. A body was tied to it, and it was in the same condition as Sahdid.

"Looks like we found Dr. Holden," Macbeth said disappointedly. He suddenly noticed his Reflection standing by. "What is it?"

Before the false doctor could say a word, a large shadow appeared behind it, and suddenly a fist was through his chest, the clawed fingers grasping his heart. The real doctor

staggered back, nearly tripping over the body behind him. Most of it was from the shock of seeing something so brutal happen to himself.

He had no time to dematerialize the being; Dante had grabbed him and was running back down the tunnel. But when they reached the entrance, they found it had closed.

"Wha- no no no!" Dante released Macbeth and began searching for another way to open it as Zoe and Dracustos caught up. A roar came from behind.

"No time for that - turn off you lights," the Draconian urged, guiding them into a small alcove off the skulled wall. After a minute of waiting, the beast didn't come. Draco cautiously peeked around the corner, then began making his way back to the tomb.

"Hey- where are you going?" Zoe whispered.

"I'm going to try to see what it is."

"If it spots you, you're in no condition to fight," Macbeth almost snapped.

"I'll be fine. If it comes this way, stay low and stay quiet." The doctor tried to grab his comrade, but the creature had already trotted off.

Dracustos went to all fours to stay as low as possible, though the predatory stalk was painful. He crept behind a pillar before standing upright, peering around the side. His sharp vision spotted the Reflection, now in the place of Dr. Holden's corpse that was tied to the scale. Surprisingly it was still alive, despite having its heart removed. The organ lay on one side of the scale.

With a snarl a large beast moved into view. It stood as tall as the Draconian. The humanoid body had a lean musculature, yet it somehow seemed malnourished. It was hairless, its head like that of a jackal, a tattered skirt-like piece of clothing around its waist. In its hand was an urn, the top resembling the creature's head.

The beast placed the urn on the other side of the scale, weighing it down further than the Reflection's heart. It roared, seemingly in frustration, then grabbed the organ. And ate it. A wail came from the doctor's clone as its essence seemed to drain away like sand, leaving it like the two corpses already in the room.

There was a crackle in Dracustos' ear. It startled him; he'd forgotten about the earpiece.

"Draco, get your scaly ass back here. Something's wrong with David." The half-dragon was about to reply when the beast suddenly turned in his direction. He quickly stuck his head

back behind the pillar, hoping it hadn't seen him somehow in the room's darkness. He could hear its heavy steps getting closer...

It was suddenly silent. After a moment of waiting, Dracustos peered around the pillar again. The dog-headed beast growled as it came into view, and it began making its way down the tunnel.

"Guys, it's coming your way. Stay quiet, stay low. Do not engage." He went back to all fours and crept his way back down the passage of corpses. When he reached the other Coils, he found David lying against the wall unconscious.

"What happened?"

"I don't fucking know, he was fine a minute ago. Next thing I know he's on the floor," Dante retorted. Dracustos knelt in front of Macbeth and patted him on the cheek in an attempt to wake him, but there was no response. "I already tried that."

This received a sigh, then the halfbreed began digging around in the doctor's pack. He pulled out a bottle of water and poured some of its contents on the Healer's head. The man stirred, blinked a few times, then sat up with a groan.

"You alright, Doc?"

"I'm... fine..." he answered, rubbing his head. He looked over his surroundings, then his eyes grew with realization. "What happened to my Reflection?"

"I think that would be better answered if I told you what that creature is. But first, we need to get back in that room." Dracustos offered a hand. It was taken, and he pulled Macbeth to his feet.

Dr. Macbeth stared at the mummified body of his Reflection almost in horror. It was certainly unsettling to see oneself tied to a pole, heart ripped from the chest, mouth still open in a silent wail. He dematerialized it before turning away.

"So, let's start with what that thing is," he said. Dracustos sat on top of the tomb.

"It's Anubis; part man, part jackal, Son of Osiris. He eats the hearts of those he finds to be impure. He took your Reflection's heart to weigh his soul. He's trying to get to the Afterlife." There was silence in the room, the Coils looking back at the scale. *"Rhambah said he's not going to help us anymore other than translating the hieroglyphics. We need to find the exit, before Anubis comes back."* Nods were given, and the Coils began looking for something, anything, that gave some sort of clue as to where the exit was.

Dracustos looked down and noticed a mural on the side of the tomb. He dropped down, almost flopping onto the floor, and looked it over. It seemed to tell a story... or a history. He called Rhambah to him, as the serpent had wandered off somewhere in the room. The Amphiptere shimmered into view as it flew to him, catching David's attention. But the snake was much smaller than before. He joined the two dragons, but saved his question about the creature's size for later.

"What did you find?" he inquired. Dracustos raised a hand for him to be quiet as he listened to Rhambah.

"This... is the history of Osiris," he replied, continuing to look over the carvings. Dante rounded the corner.

"That's interesting and all, but shouldn't you be focusing on *finding a way out?*"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you. Osiris knew his time on Earth had come, so he had this temple built for his journey to the Afterlife. Anubis turned his wrath on the people... hundreds were sacrificed in his attempt to join his father. But because his own soul is corrupt, he needed a pure one to enter the Afterlife; a pure heart, if you will. This pyramid became a prison, closed by the Egyptians to get rid of their own god."

"Fascinating, but where's the part about where the exit is?"

"There's... something about a star map."

"Well then, let's get to it. Keep an eye out for a map of the night sky. Let's hope we can find it before Anubis returns." They went off in search of this map, but Dracustos remained at the tomb.

"Hold up," he instructed, standing upright. *"The exit shaft points to where the dead was supposed to be resurrected."*

"There's like, six shafts in here," Dante reported. "How do we know which is the right one?" The halfbreed didn't answer, still thinking. He turned his eyes upward. On the ceiling above the tomb were silhouettes of constellations, each one formed with glittering dots.

"The stars..." The halfbreed climbed back on top of the crypt for a better look. *"The ceiling - Doc, give me a light."* Macbeth did as he was requested, shining his headlamp at the roof. *"In between those hieroglyphs, those dots. That's the star map!"*

"So, what exactly are we looking for?" the doctor asked.

"The tetrahedron. The three-sided pyramid is also the symbol for the Sirius star." The doctor moved his light around the map until one of the dots shone brighter than the rest. *"Stop! There it is, the brightest one."* Draco shifted his gaze downward. *"It's above that shaft - that has to be the way out!"* As he hopped down from his perch Dante and Zoe went to check it out.

"Look! There's a rope ladder. This must be how Lazar got in!" the girl exclaimed. Dante sighed in relief.

"Thank you Captain Egypt," he mumbled. "Welp, let's get out of this hellhole. Ladies first." Zoe nodded and used the shelf-like indentions in the wall to climb up, and with an extra boost from Dante she reached the ladder and began to ascend. The agent soon followed. Dr. Macbeth stood by.

"You go next, Dracustos. I'll need a clear shot if Anubis comes after us." He received a shake of the head.

"I'm already one foot in the grave. I'll just slow you down anyways."

"I'm not asking."

"Neither am I. Look, we don't have time-" Dracustos stopped, raising his head and fanning out his ears as he glanced around the room, his eyes widening. He grabbed David and pushed him into the shaft. *"Get your ass moving before I bite it!"* Somewhat fearful his comrade will hold true to the threat, he began climbing. As he ascended, he constantly glanced down at Dracustos. The halfbreed was struggling to keep up.

A roar came from below; the Devourer was coming. Dracustos looked down to find the beast scrambling up the shaft. He opened his mouth to spit fire, then stopped. He couldn't do that just yet; he'd burn the ladder they were climbing. He snarled in aggravation and drew the polearm he had taken in the beginning. There was no denying the god would catch up to him, but he couldn't let it get to the others.

He thrust the weapon at Anubis, striking the beast in the shoulder. He roared and swiped a clawed hand at the halfbreed, continuing to charge up. Dracustos couldn't get another hit in before the god grabbed him and used its weight to pull him off the ladder. They both fell into the darkness below.

"Dracustos!" No response came, and Macbeth sighed as he stared into the shadows, hoping to see his comrade come struggling up the ladder. But no one came.

"Doc, get moving!" Dante called from above. The man began to climb again, then there was another roar, the scraping of claws against stone. He didn't expect Anubis to return so quickly.

Dr. Macbeth pulled his Winchester around, pressing his back against the opposing wall for support as he took aim. He squeezed the trigger. The bullet went through the beast's forehead... but the god merely faltered for a moment before continuing its charge. Another shot was fired with the same result. David suddenly remembered the weapon he took from Dracustos - but where did he put it?

His pack! It was in his pack! David swung his rifle back around and fumbled with the bag, trying to get the scimitar. He grabbed the handle-

Anubis was faster than he was. The god grabbed his ankle, pulling him down in the same manner as Dracustos. Noticing the sudden silence, Dante glanced down to find the doctor was gone.

"Dante, what's going on?" Zoe asked. He waved a frantic hand at her.

"Just keep going!"

After a couple minutes there was a third roar. Dante made the same mistake Macbeth did and pulled out his pistol, firing several shots at the Devourer. Just as David's bullets had no effect, nor did these.

"Dante?!" He looked up at a frightened Zoe and grinned.

"Just keep going, kid! Don't look back!" He pulled out his Egyptian weapon and took a swing at Anubis. The blow missed, and after a few brief seconds of struggle he too was taken.

Zoe watched them fall into the shadows, tears welling up in her eyes. She finally looked back up; there wasn't that much further to go. She began to climb. But what will she do once she reached the top? Will she find some way to seal the entrance of the pyramid, despite her friends still being inside? Will she use her Angelic form to destroy the god? Was there really anything she could do that wouldn't put her fellow Coils in danger?

She reached the top of the shaft and began to climb out.

The roar of Anubis came once more, but he was right under Zoe. She desperately tried to grab on to something as he dragged her down. The beast dug his claws into her shoulder, pulling her away from anything she could have grasped, and he fell back down with the girl in his clutches.

Zoe woke with a start. She soon found she couldn't move and fully opened her eyes. She was tied to the scale, and her fellow Coils were bound and sitting in a row against the crypt, all of them unconscious. She wiggled in an attempt to get free, but the rope was firm and tight.

"David," she called in a whisper, squirming again. But the movement wasn't to get free; she was trying to reach the dagger in her pocket. "David!" she called again, slightly louder. But the man did not stir, nor did the others.

There was a fierce snarl, and she quickly turned her head to the right to look into the skull-like face of Anubis. He growled at her, then took a step back and placed his urn on the scale. Fear gripped Zoe's heart; she knew what was going to happen next. Her efforts to reach the dagger became more frantic, but it was in a lower pocket and the ropes constricted her movement.

Another snarl came from the god as he stepped in front of the girl, and he drew his hand back to rip her heart from her chest. But he didn't thrust his talons into her as he did his previous victims. No, he came in slowly. Zoe writhed as the claws got near, then stopped as they began to penetrate her breast. For a split second she considered using one of her forms.

A fireball struck Anubis in the head, and he turned with an angry hiss to find Dracustos had freed himself. The halfbreed pointed his polearm at the god.

"Step away from the girl." The Devourer stared at his challenger... and let out a sickly laugh. *"You'll never get to the Afterlife like this, Anubis. Not with a human heart, for Man will always be corrupt at His core."* This seemed to anger the god. He suddenly charged the blue beast, covering the space between them in a mere two steps. A clawed hand was swung at Draco's head, but he jumped and landed on Anubis' shoulders, then shoved the god away with another jump. As the Draconian landed he swung the polearm and cut the ropes that held Zoe.

He staggered and leaned on the weapon for support; the previous actions were beyond his current ability to move. Zoe rushed to his side and tried to help, but there was really nothing she could do. Anubis turned back to them with an angry roar.

"Zoe... get the others and get out. Seal the entrance," Dracustos ordered. He winced at a wave of pain.

"But you'll be—"

"Just do it." Smoke began seeping from the corners of his mouth and his eyes changed, and as he straightened up his horns grew. Anubis tilted his head in curiosity, completely ignoring Zoe as she made her way to Dante and Macbeth. He wanted to fight this strange creature. With a fierce roar he charged.

Zoe pulled the dagger from her pocket and cut the binds of the Coils, then gave Dante a gentle shake. He groaned, blinked drowsily, groaned again. He sat up and rubbed his head.

"Ugh, what..." A loud *thwack* brought him out of it as the halfbreed was thrown against the end of the crypt, startling both him and Zoe. They both cast their gazes upon the battle; Anubis had grabbed Dracustos by the throat and was holding him against the floor, claws poised to strike. But he wasn't prepared for the fire that leapt from the beast's mouth.

"Dante come on, we need to go," Zoe urged. The man watched his comrade who dared to challenge a god for a moment longer, then proceeded in attempting to wake Dr. Macbeth. He gave the man a shake, then a few pats on the cheek. The doctor was quick to wake, but had no time to collect himself before being pulled to his feet.

Anubis threw Dracustos against a pillar, the force nearly crippling the ancient structure. It did cripple the halfbreed however. After hitting the ground he was unable to get back on his feet. The god lay his ears back, an expression that read "how pathetic". Interest lost, Anubis turned to prevent his other prey from escaping.

The Coils made a break for it, but before they could reach the exit a group of Sphynxes appeared, fur bristling as they yowled and hissed. The three turned to go back, but their path was blocked by Anubis.

Dracustos coughed, red fluid splattering among the ground. He hurt even more than before; no doubt his skeleton was riddled with fractures from being slammed around. He moved to get up, but found his limbs were unwilling to cooperate. His vision began to waver.

Looks like you need some help... The halfbreed ignored the voice, trying again to stand. He couldn't let Anubis get to the Serpents. *Why do you protect them? Humans are vile creatures, filled with lies and deceit.*

That may be, but they are my friends.

I once thought the same... There was a spark of curiosity within Dracustos, but any questions he had needed to be saved for later. If there was a later.

If you can help me, do it. If not, shut up and leave me be.

As you wish...

The Coils shuffled between the god and cat-like creatures, unwilling to face the claws of either. The Sphynxes then ran past them unexpectedly and began to attack Anubis. They used the distraction to their advantage and rushed to the shaft. Zoe was allowed to go first, followed by Dante. David began to hoist himself up the wall, then paused as he glanced across the room.

He spotted Dracustos, slowly rising to his feet. But something seemed different about him. A strange symbol seemed to be scorching itself onto his scales in various places, and his horns had changed shape. This wasn't the Feral State Macbeth was familiar with. He was so distracted by the sight he didn't notice the Sphynxes retreating.

Macbeth's view was suddenly blocked by the head of Anubis. The god tossed him to the ground and threw his head back in a furious bellow. The Devourer was pissed that mere mortals were causing him so much trouble. He moved in to retrieve the organ he needed-

There was another roar, but it did not come from Anubis. Dracustos leapt from the crypt and rammed the dog-headed figure into the wall, shoving the spear end of the polearm through the beast's midsection. For once, the god was knocked to the ground and stayed down, stunned from the force the Draconian somehow managed to muster. Dracustos helped David to his feet. The man noticed his comrade's body temperature had risen a great deal; he was almost too hot to touch.

"Get going," Dracustos commanded, *"I'll hold him off."* Macbeth opened his mouth to protest, but was interrupted when Anubis began scrambling against the floor, trying to unpin himself from the stone. The Knight once again lifted the doctor into the exit.

"Go!" Anubis tackled the Draconian out of sight, and after a moment of contemplation David began to climb.

The pillar crumbled under the force of Anubis as he rammed Dracustos through it. The blow knocked the air from the half-dragon's lungs, and he was sent to the stone floor gasping for air. The Devourer gave him no time to recover.

The man sprinted down the dark passage. He didn't know exactly where he was going; he just ran straight. Eventually he saw a faint light and a familiar entrance. He ducked out, going as fast as he could through the cramped tunnel. Dr. Macbeth paused when he got outside, taking a deep breath of fresh air. The sun was beginning to set, making it cool and crisp. He spotted Zoe sitting under the shade of the tarp and Dante running to him.

"Doc, come on, Rhambah's about to collapse the tunnel," he informed, pulling on the man's arm. But he didn't move.

"Wait, Dracustos is still down there!" Macbeth received a look from Dante, one he was familiar with from his days of war. The look when a comrade sacrificed themselves. When a teammate wasn't coming back.

"David..." The Healer turned back towards the tunnel. The voice was very weak.

“Dracustos?”

“... keep my town safe...”

“Dracustos!” Dr. Macbeth took a step to run back, but Dante stopped him.

“David wait-” There was a thunderous rumble, and the ceiling of the passage crumbled, sending large plumes of sand and dust into the air. David stared at the rubble. That was it, then? This is how he loses one of his best Coils? To a god, trapped inside a labyrinth filled with traps?

He sighed. Now he needed to decide how to inform Rejection of their loss. There was another rumble, and the golden serpent came up from the ground. He was large again; David guessed he crushed the tunnel like a boa does its prey. The snake slithered to his side.

“Your help was... appreciated,” the doctor said, casting a glance at Rhambah. The Amphiptere tilted his head, his tongue flicking out. David began to leave. “Come on, let’s go home.”

The snake slithered in front of him, spreading his wings a little as he spoke in his feral tongue. The behavior received a shake of the head.

“I’m afraid I don’t understand.” There was more chittering from the beast as it gestured with its wings, then pointed with his tail tip.

“I have no idea what he’s saying, but I think he wants us to wait,” Dante suggested.

“Wait? What for?” Rhambah responded by slithering back, and David noticed what looked like a sphere floating between the serpent’s horns. He didn’t recall it being there before.

The sphere glowed a golden light before a white portal appeared in front of the Amphiptere. Rhambah spread his wings and vanished into it. Dante blinked in confusion.

“The hell...?” The light grew brighter, then the serpent reappeared. As it landed, David noticed it held something in its mouth. It gently set its cargo down; it was Dracustos. The doctor wasted no time in sprinting to the Draconian. He skidded to a halt and dropped to his knees. The halfbreed’s breathing was spastic and irregular. A pool of blood was already seeping out from under his form.

“Dracustos? Draco, talk to me!” He rolled the scaly beast onto his back when something rolled out of his clawed hands, and the man’s eyes widened in shock. There was another hole in his comrade’s chest where his heart should have been. The organ now lay in the sand.

Dr. Macbeth didn't hear himself curse. He desperately began digging into his bag. Dracustos was somehow still alive, still breathing; if he could keep him that way, perhaps he could still save him. He hoped he had enough stitching.

A shadow fell over them, but it was ignored. It wasn't until the serpent began chattering again when the Healer glanced up at the golden scales.

"Unless you can help, leave me be," he said, waving a dismissive hand. He needed to focus. Rhambah snorted before backing away, and he began drawing something in the dirt. When he was done he took the orb from between his horns and placed it somewhere in the design.

David payed no heed to the event behind him as the serpent's drawing glowed, and a being rose from it. Their shadow was cast over him as they approached, and when the doctor went to retrieve Draco's heart he found it in the hands of another half-animal creature. He looked into the eyes of a lioness, her tan fur standing out against her brilliant red dress. A headdress bore a cobra in front of a gold disk on her scalp.

She gave a soft, warm smile - one the doctor often gave to help earn trust.

"Allow me to help, Doctor."

Why are you willing to die for them?

I told you before. They're my friends.

They cannot be trusted.

David would never turn against me. He already knows I'm not to be trifled with.

I once thought the same for the humans I called friend.

... Who are you?

I am not you as you first thought. I am trapped here, though I don't know how or why.

Just answer the question.

... I was once called... Irascor.

December 25, Healing Hands Clinic

The halfbreed's eyes cracked open. The room was dully lit. It was quiet, save for his own quick, shallow breaths. He didn't remember much of the events inside the pyramid. There was blood, he knew that. Lives were lost. His heart...

His eyes snapped open with a gasp and he tried to sit up. A severe wave of pain shot through his body, sending him back to the firm cushioned surface he lay on with a grimace. Now that Dracustos was fully awake, he looked over his surroundings. It wasn't exactly familiar, and he couldn't see much due to being surrounded by curtains. But he was relieved he was no longer in that tomb of blood.

Something shifted next to him. He looked to his left to find Zoe Thanatos, curled up and asleep in a chair. For a second he considered waking her, then decided to let her sleep. His ears perked up; someone else was coming.

Dante and Dr. Macbeth walked through the curtain.

"So you're telling me you've gone a couple hundred years without-" Dante stopped mid-sentence when he laid eyes upon the conscious Dracustos. "Well merry fucking Christmas, you're back to the land of the living!" The man's commotion woke Zoe. She blinked and looked around before her gaze settled on the Draconian.

"You're awake!" Macbeth took a seat on the opposite side.

"I'm surprised you're conscious this soon, considering your wounds and blood loss. How are you feeling?" he asked. Dracustos was silent for a moment as he took in the aches and pains he was in.

"My heart hurts..." he answered. David gave his warm grin.

"So did ours." The halfbreed looked over the Coils, his eyes stopping on Dante. More specifically, Dante's shirt.

"That's one of the ugliest sweaters I've ever seen."

"Better get used to it, 'cause I've got one for each day of Christmas," the man replied.

"I think it's actually making me nauseous."

"In that case, I'll just go." Dante cast a glance at Zoe. "You coming kiddo? I'm sure a bed would be more comfortable." She nodded with a yawn before following him out of the room. Dr. Macbeth waited a moment to make sure they were gone before speaking.

"Do you remember anything? From the tomb?" Dracustos was silent in thought again. As he thought, images flashed in his mind, reminding him of the events that had transpired.

"I remember... Anubis... fighting him... he..." The halfbreed subconsciously placed a hand over his chest. *"How am I still alive...?"*

"It wasn't easy," David replied, "even with the help I received." He was given a questioning glance. "Turns out Rhambah can summon other Egyptian gods. Or in this case, a goddess. Sekhmet." This earned a grin from Dracustos, and he would have laughed if it wasn't so painful. David tilted his head in curiosity.

"That's quite fitting for you, David. Sekhmet is the goddess of war, as well as healing." The doctor was silent for a moment as he contemplated this.

"That's... interesting," he said, rubbing his chin. After a moment longer he dismissed the subject with a sigh. "Anyways, I was referring to your Feral State. It was different, and you seem to have gained some markings."

"Markings?" Macbeth gestured to the scaled hand. On its back was a pattern, seemingly burned into the scales. It was a ring with a point on one side, a dot in the middle of the ring. It seemed familiar to Dracustos, yet he was a stranger to it.

"What other changes were there?"

"Your horns changed shape. They waved, as opposed to their inner curve. And your body temperature... you were almost too hot to touch." Dracustos was silent. He sensed there was some connection between these changes and that voice-

The voice. It had a name, one that made him unsettled.

"Any ideas as to the cause of these new changes?" Dr. Macbeth inquired.

"Irascor..."

"Pardon?" The Draconian sighed.

"I didn't tell you before, but I've started hearing this voice in my head. Back when I faced Adder... At first I thought it was just from my anger, an embodiment of sorts, because afterwards I didn't hear it again. But back in the pyramid when I was fighting Anubis... when I was down... it spoke to me again. I think it's some sort of entity."

"Am I safe to presume it called itself Irascor?"

"Yes, and that worries me."

"Why is that?"

"Irascor is Latin, meaning 'to be wrathful'. Ira itself means 'wrath'." David rubbed his chin again.

"I see... perhaps this Irascor is where your Feral State comes from. That would explain why you are the way you are when you lose control." Draco debated telling him that it didn't trust him, or anyone, for that matter. He decided against it.

"I'll ask my father about it. He knows more than I do."

"Would you like me to invite him in, or however you summon a dragon?"

"No, no... I'll wait until I get out of here. He doesn't really like cities."

"Very well." Dr. Macbeth stood. "I'm sure you're still tired, so I'll leave you to get some rest." He began to leave, then paused at the curtain. "We all owe you our lives, Dracustos. I don't know what we would have done without you." He passed through the curtains, and Dracustos laid his head back.

You all would have died...

December 31, Rejection's Graveyard

It was almost midnight. The residents of the town had all gathered in the central park for fireworks. All but one.

Dracustos sat next to his mother's tombstone. Macbeth had protested his leaving the clinic, as he was still in bad shape. But he went anyways. No doubt he would be scolded later, but there was something he wanted to do for his people. They often got antsy when he was gone for a while; this time even more so after being in critical condition. He wanted to let them know he was fine. Or going to be, anyways.

There. The shriek of the first firework. As it burst into an array of colors, Dracustos manipulated its sparks, keeping them alive as they reformed into the shape of a dragon. He made it roar, then fly around a bit before it spat fire in a spectacular display. His sensitive ears could just barely pick up the cheers of his people's excitement. Satisfied, he let the colored sparks fade. He suddenly felt a twinge of pain, and glanced down to find his bandages turning red. Flying back was a bad idea; he'd have to call for a pickup. Dracustos stood, then placed a hand on the tombstone next to him.

"They've made it another year, Mom. I've made it another year."